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**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20310**

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF:

DAAG-PAP-A (M) (26 Jan 73) DAFD-OTT

9 February 1973

SUBJECT: Senior Officer Debriefing Report: LTC James J. Cortez,
Senior Advisor, 1st Armor Brigade, 15 June 1972 - 15 November 1972 (U)

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1. Reference: AR 525-14, Senior Officer Debriefing Report, (U) 2 July 1971.
2. Transmitted herewith is the report of LTC James J. Cortez, subject as above.
3. This report is provided to insure appropriate benefits are realized from the experiences of the author. The report should be reviewed in accordance with paragraphs 3 and 5, AR 525-14; however, it should not be interpreted as the official view of the Department of the Army, or of any agency of the Department of the Army.
4. Information of actions initiated under provisions of AR 525-14, as a result of subject report should be provided to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development, ATTN: DAFD-OTT within 90 days of receipt of covering letter.

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HEADQUARTERS
FIRST REGIONAL ASSISTANCE COMMAND
1st Armor Brigade Advisory Detachment
APO San Francisco 96349

17 November 1972

SUBJECT: Senior Advisor's Debrief Report (U)

Commanding General
First Regional Assistance Command
ATTN: G-3
APO 96349

Debrief Report By: Lieutenant Colonel James J. Cortez
Duty Assignment: Senior Advisor, 1st Armor Brigade
Inclusive Dates: 15 June 1972 - 15 November 1972
Date of Report: 16 November 1972

1. (C) Introduction:

a. The subordinate units of the Brigade suffered severe personnel and equipment losses during the North Vietnamese invasion of Spring 1972; consequently, the earlier portion of the time frame considered can best be described as a period of refitting, receiving replacement personnel and intensive training.

b. Particular emphasis and interest were focused on the 20th Tank Squadron (M48A3). The units did return to action in time to participate in the counteroffensive and contributed significantly to its success. The Brigade, however, never received a mission and its activity was limited to monitoring the administrative and logistical support of the units.

2. (C) Organization:

The Brigade consisted of the 20th Tank Squadron (M48A3) and the 11th, 17th, and 18th Cavalry Regiments. The 11th Cavalry Regiment

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returned to its parent unit, the 3d Infantry Division, in early September. The 18th Cavalry Regiment is a III Corps unit OPCON to I Corps and its 1st Troop (tank troop) is from the 15th Cavalry Regiment, III Corps. 1st Troop of the 18th Cav is in MR 3.

3. (C) Leadership:

a. The Brigade Commander, COL Gia, is mostly an unknown quantity as his activities were limited. He was not observed in the field in stressful situations. It might be added at this point that he did serve previously under the current I Corps commander in another region and apparently favorably impressed him. His trips to the field to visit subordinate units were very rare, but he did utilize the Brigade Deputy, COL Viet, to visit units. My overall impression is that COL Gia did not impact on the subordinate units of the Brigade and did not make his presence felt. This can partially be attributed to a reluctance to interfere with the operations of other major units that the units of the Brigade were ~~not~~ attached to. He did rule with an iron hand in the areas in which I saw him active.

b. The Brigade Deputy Commander, COL Viet, is more of an outgoing, energetic and forceful individual. Things did get accomplished in the Brigade as a result of his efforts, such as improvement in the functioning of the Brigade staff and increased emphasis on logistic matters. I consider him a strong leader and capable of running the Brigade in combat.

c. The CO of the 20th Tank Squadron, LTC Ta, is the best leader in the Brigade and I suspect better than most other ARVN officers of his rank or even those senior to him.

d. The CO of the 11th Cav, MAJ Lao, is quite competent. He is relatively young, eager to perform well, and tries very hard.

e. The CO of the 17th Cav, LTC Dung, is far from flamboyant but very calm under stress and quite competent.

f. The CO of the 18th Cav, MAJ Si, is an impressive looking individual and appears to be competent.

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4. (C) Operations:

All units of the Brigade were piecemeal assigned to major units in the MR. Brigade, Squadron, Regiments and, in many cases companies, did not have missions. Assets were broken down to platoon and section level. M-113's were used as trucks as well as combat vehicles, and tanks were generally used as assault guns. There was one exception to this - when the 17th Cav had a mission assigned in September when it was OPCON to the 1st Ranger Group; even then it had very little of its organic assets. The Marine Division and the 1st Ranger Group did tend to utilize armor assets assigned to them better. Attitudes and working relationships were also excellent in these units. In general, the prolonged fragmentary employment created problems in supply, leadership, morale, maintenance, and combat effectiveness.

5. (C) Training:

All of the units of the Brigade need a rigorous training program that stresses fundamentals. The platoons and individual crews have been piecemeal committed for over five months. They have forgotten what they once knew; they have developed bad habits; and sense of pride is almost nil. Replacement personnel do learn individual skills but do not undergo reaction drills and as a consequence do not perform as well as they are capable of performing in stressful situations. I strongly suspect that platoons are not able to perform as fully cohesive fighting units. Recent incidents appear to indicate this. They do well in their current role but the role is limited. The necessary skills and expertise are present but the units have lost their fine edge. Individual, crew, and basic unit training is badly needed.

6. (C) Maintenance:

a. Crew maintenance in general can best be described as corrective rather than preventive. Some crews are better than others and the older, more experienced crews do perform what can be described as preventive maintenance. This is also a function of command emphasis. Some company commanders stress it, most do not. Battalion level maintenance presents a more positive picture. This is especially true of the 20th Tank Squadron. They have an aggressive attitude and will work long

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hours to accomplish their mission. The Battalion maintenance officer is the driving force in the 20th Tank maintenance program. He is not perfect and has his faults (and bad habits) but he gets the job done.

b. Supporting maintenance for the 20th Tank Squadron is poor. This is an area that all advisors concerned, ordnance and armor, have discussed and in general are in mutual agreement. I feel that ARVN ordnance is still in the learning stages and does not yet fully understand the M48A3 tank and its attendant requirements. This subject can be addressed better by the ordnance advisors.

7. (C) Advisory Effort:

a. The emphasis of the advisory effort, from the outset, was the 20th Tank Squadron. This advisor also realized that there was not much time to be lost in getting all of the units fully operational again. Points had to be addressed bluntly and directly with emphasis on rapid reaction. Use was made of written memorandum and the Senior Advisor also went to units, unaccompanied by the Brigade Commander, to assess the situation, set the example, and encourage the subordinate commanders. It is felt that this affected the advisor/counterpart relationship to some degree. I also feel that my rank was a factor at work in the relationship. There was mutual respect and understanding and, occasionally, some warmth. There was, in general, a somewhat free exchange of ideas. This was sometimes accomplished directly; there were other times when it was obvious that the Deputy Commander was tasked to "sound me out." Excellent relationships were established with subordinate unit commanders. I found them much more open to ideas and suggestions.

b. I also found that the commanders do anticipate a drastic reduction in the advisory effort and exhibited some anxiety about it.

8. (C) ARVN Attitudes:

a. There was an interesting shift in attitudes during the conduct of the counteroffensive. The question initially asked of the commander and others was, "What success do you think will be realized by the counteroffensive; how long will it take, and how far will it go?" The

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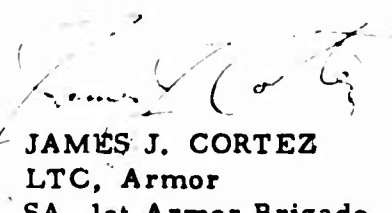
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common response at the beginning was, "It all depends on US air power and support in general." Immediately before the successful completion of the Quang Tri phase, a common remark made was, "We should push on to Dong Ha." US support was mentioned in passing.

b. There was also great relief when Mr. Nixon was reelected to the Presidency.

9. (C) Overall Evaluation:

The Brigade accomplished its mission, its units trained, deployed, and participated in the counteroffensive. The training was limited, however, and continued fragmentation and normal personnel turnover have taken their toll. The units are essentially good, skills are present and the leaders are competent. The fine edge is gone, though, and the cohesive spirit has dissipated. A sound training program is badly needed. Units should be employed as units (company and platoon) more often to help them reestablish their identity.


JAMES J. CORTEZ
LTC, Armor
SA, 1st Armor Brigade

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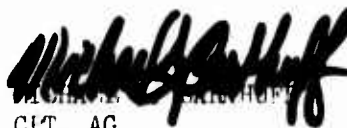
DA, Headquarters First Regional Assistance Command, APO San Francisco 96349

TO: COMUSMACV, ATTN: MACDO-04, APO San Francisco 96222

1. This headquarters has ~~reviewed~~ the Senior Advisor's Debriefing Report from LTC James J. Cortez, departing Senior Advisor of the 1st Armor Brigade, and concurs with the report.

2. In an effort to overcome maintenance problems, as discussed in paragraph 6 of the report, a Logistics Improvement Team Composed of I Corps and IALC staff members is currently visiting units in MRI to determine supply and maintenance problems. The Team will make on the spot corrections, and recommend areas for emphasis and training. The I Corps G4 has been advised that 1st and 2nd echelon maintenance should receive emphasis in all units, but particularly in the Armored Brigade.

FOR THE COMMANDER:


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